

AFTER-DINNER PHILOSOPHY

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BY

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With an Introductory Talk on

THE NEED FOR PHILOSOPHY

BY

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AND A PREFACE BY

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NOTE

THE Dialogues contained in this book were broadcast fortnightly during the autumn and winter of 1925.

The arguments by myself advanced make no claim to conclusiveness ; on the contrary, despite the fact that Mr. Strachey habitually failed to knock holes in them, they are not always even water-tight. Even when the conclusions reached seem incapable of refutation, they need give no cause for alarm ; philosophers have adopted many positions which it is impossible to disprove, but which there is absolutely no reason to think true. The numerous correspondents who found some of my conclusions depressing, pessimistic, or derogatory to the virtue or dignity of the human species, may, therefore, take comfort. They belong to the great class of people who hold certain beliefs to be true and certain things to be right, not because they have examined the arguments for and against them, tested them in discussion and proved them by experience, but because, having been born in a particular bedroom at a certain spot on

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the world's surface at a certain moment in its history, they reflect the views appropriate to their place and age. If any such have been led by these Dialogues to overhaul their beliefs, and found them, as a result, on a surer basis than that afforded by hearsay, tradition or convention, these words, whether of truth or sophistry, will not have been wirelessly in vain.

C.E.M.J.

PREFACE

WHEN Mr. Joad—or was it Mr. Strachey?—first suggested philosophy as a suitable subject for broadcasting into the homes of two million Britons between the Opera and the Tango band, one naturally had a fit of apoplexy. “The English people,” I said, “do not care for philosophy. They have religion, some of them. Others pin their faith to a set of beliefs called, approximately, Science. Others, having neither, despise both. Philosophers they regard as Germans, or worse.”

But Mr. Strachey—or was it Mr. Joad?—pleaded that these little Dialogues were not really philosophy at all. They were airy trifles—*apéritifs* of the mind, merely. Then I remembered what my revered schoolmaster, afterwards Bishop Percival, said of *Lux Mundi*. “At any rate,” said that stout Evangelical, “it’ll make the High Church people read their Bibles !”

So the Joad-Strachey debates came on to the programme as a great experiment. It proved a success. I have turned up our correspondence

figures for the month when the talks began, and I find that 16 people protested against this or that fallacy which they had been able to detect in the argument, what time 53 persons took the trouble to write applause. Since then there has been a steady recurrence of appreciation in our correspondence at the B.B.C. headquarters. Evidently we were not wrong in our belief that many people like (if manners permit) to gnaw the bone of thought in the course of the banquet of entertainment.

Some of the 16 complained that the Joad-Strachey discussions were unsettling—not to the actual writers, of course, but to others of less fine discernment or less firm convictions. Nobody, so far as I can remember, wrote saying “Since hearing Mr. Joad I have given up my pew at St. Thomas’s.”

I fancy nobody and nothing has been genuinely shocked, except a few old truisms and platitudes which are all the better for a shaking now and then. When Mr. Joad has done with them they will resume their thrones all the better for the exercise.

J. C. STOBART.

SAVOY HILL,
15.7.26.

INTRODUCTION

THE NEED FOR PHILOSOPHY

(This introductory chapter was first delivered as one of a series of wireless talks on The Art of Living.)

THE inclusion of a talk on the need for Philosophy in a series dealing with the Art of Living requires, at first sight, some justification. Philosophy, threatened on the one side by the encroachments of science, and on the other by the growth of psychology, has in recent years been out of fashion. The subject is thought to be dull, barren, and disagreeable. It is said that philosophy has no relationship to life, and that its results are either untrue, or, if true, remote from actuality. If by this is meant that philosophy does not solve for us the practical problems of everyday existence, the charge must be admitted. If life is considered to be an art, philosophers are not its artists, nor does the study of philosophy confer a knowledge of its technique. If life be regarded as a chess problem, philosophy does not provide a ready-made

solution. In so far as philosophers have claimed that the study of their works fitted the student for the business of life, the claim is largely unfounded.

That a knowledge of philosophy does not directly affect the business of living, an observation of philosophers will readily prove. The political philosopher is no better either as a citizen or as a statesman than his neighbours. The metaphysician cannot provide an agreed and demonstrably correct answer to the questions, how the universe started, whether it works mechanically, whether there is a God, or whether there is such a thing as matter. The morals of the ethical philosopher are not noticeably superior to those of the plain man. In particular he is not necessarily remarkable for what is known as the "philosophic temperament." He is not more serene, and he is not better tempered than the man in the street; he is just as likely to betray ill-temper when he breaks a bootlace, or to swear when he sits on a pin. A knowledge of all the ethical systems that have been propounded since man began to moralize will not make the philosopher a good man, and thinking will certainly not make him a happy one. On the contrary, there seems

to be good reason for supposing that happiness and knowledge are in many ways incompatible, so that we are still to-day faced with the choice, which the Greeks propounded long ago, between being a happy pig or an unhappy Socrates. This fact need not, however, cause distress, since the question whether happiness is the only thing which is desirable is itself a philosophical question, capable of being answered in many different ways.

The result is that when the lecturer on Philosophy is faced with the inevitable question, "What's the good of it?" he is reluctantly compelled to admit that, unlike psycho-analysis which enables you to read the secret thoughts of your friends, or literature which provides you with suitable topics for intellectual conversation, or science which enables you to ride in a motor-car, philosophy has no direct value.

In the second place, it is said that philosophy arrives at no concrete results. This is a serious charge in an age which, being guided in the main by the stomach and pocket view of life, demands of whatever is proffered for its approval that it shall deliver "the goods." Now, if by "the

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goods " is meant a complete set of agreed answers to all the questions that have puzzled mankind since speculation began, it must be admitted that philosophy has none to deliver. The philosopher, instead of building upon the foundations laid by his predecessor, spends most of his energy in destroying the work of those who have gone before, disputing their hypotheses and throwing doubt on their conclusions. There is no one philosophy to which all philosophers will agree, as there is, for example, one multiplication table to which all mathematicians agree. Many of the disputes of philosophers are, moreover, disputes about what exactly it is that they are disputing about. Hence arises the gibe that a philosopher is like a blind man looking in a dark room for a black cat that isn't there.

But philosophy, after all, is the oldest of the sciences, and we should feel respectful towards the old and rally to their defence. Having, therefore, frankly stated the charges against philosophy, and pointed out the respects in which they are well grounded, let us see what answer philosophy has to make in its defence.

In the first place, the charge that philosophy

arrives at no definite conclusions, though true in a sense, is true only in a highly Pickwickian one. All the sciences started life as philosophy. Astronomy, mathematics, biology and physics were branches of philosophy in the time of the Greeks, and, for so long as they were purely speculative in character, philosophy they remained. So soon, however, as anything definite began to be known about them, they seceded from philosophy and became separate sciences in their own right. Philosophy is thus in the unfortunate position of a schoolmaster who must inevitably lose his pupils directly they show promise. Definite knowledge has no place in philosophy, and it is in this superb aloofness from brute fact that men have found much of its charm.

Let us assume for a moment that philosophy is entirely inconclusive, and never does and never can increase the stock of our information about the universe. Is it, therefore, valueless? If we put philosophy at the very lowest valuation, and admit the very worst that has been said about it, it becomes a kind of game. The game is that of discovering the reasons for what we wish to believe upon instinct; yet to find these reasons is none

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the less an instinct. It is the instinct of intellectual curiosity, and it is an instinct which only philosophy can fully satisfy.

It is admitted that the body requires exercise to keep it in condition, and football, boxing and gymnastics are praised even by utilitarians. But the mind requires exercise just as much as the body, and philosophy, which is the gymnastics of the mind, is the pursuit which above all others spring-cleans the mind and keeps it in training. This it does by argument and dialectic. Argument is fun, and there is no argument like a philosophical argument. Its very inconclusiveness is its fascination. Every argument about facts comes to an abrupt termination when the facts are known. If you have an argument with a man about the time at which a train leaves London for Newcastle, there will always come a stage at which someone will fetch the time-table and look it up. When this has happened there is no more to be said. Thus every argument except a philosophical argument is at the mercy of the man who knows. Now the production of fact stifles the exercise of intelligence by rendering it unnecessary. Philosophy, which is the only

form of study in which nothing can definitely be known, alone emancipates its followers from the limitations of factual knowledge.

But philosophy is more than a game, and influences our lives in ways which are more profound than those of mental athletics. This practical influence of philosophy is exerted in two ways. Philosophy will take a common object and show us that we know much less about it than we expected. A chair, for example, which appears to common sense to be four wooden legs surmounted by a square wooden seat, can be shown by philosophical reflection to be an idea in the mind of God, a colony of souls, a collection of sense data, a piece of our own psychology or a modification of the Absolute. Philosophy can give very good reasons for supposing that the chair is each and all of these things, and, although it cannot definitely prove which of them it is, it at least makes it quite certain that it is not just a chair. From this point of view the value of philosophy lies largely in its uncertainty. The man who has no acquaintance with philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices, the preferences and the habitual beliefs derived from

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the society in which he happens to have been born, and the period in which he lives. If he is born in Turkey he thinks it right to have four wives ; if in England, only one. If he is born in 300 B.C., he thinks the sun goes round the earth ; if in A.D. 1900, he takes the contrary view. None of the views which he holds are the result of independent thought ; all are the product of convictions which, having grown up without the consent of his reason, are merely the reflection of the conventions and prejudices of his age. To such a man the world tends to become dull and obvious. Common objects provoke no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. Philosophy, which raises doubts about what has hitherto been taken for granted, keeps alive the sense of wonder and restores mystery to the world. By diminishing our certainty as to what is, it enormously increases the possibility of what may be. Thus it makes life more interesting, not because of the answers it provides to the questions it raises, but because, by the mere process of raising such questions, it liberates us from the dominance of the actual and sets us on the threshold of the region of emancipating thought.

In the second place, philosophy confers a certain largeness upon the mind, and ultimately upon the character, through the largeness of the objects of its quest. Taking the whole realm of knowledge for its sphere, it deals with those ultimate questions which are of the profoundest import for human weal or woe. For equipment to grapple with these problems philosophy arms herself with the most up-to-date resources of knowledge, including the results achieved by the special sciences. The philosopher does not presume to question these results ; they are true, no doubt, within their own sphere. " But what," he asks, " is their import within a larger sphere ? "

" The biologist," he says, " tells me this, and this seems to point to one kind of universe. The physicist, on the other hand, tells me that, which seems to suggest another. Now are this and that really contradictory, or do they both yield to some deeper interpretation which reconciles them both ? In any event, what is their significance for the answer to those questions that have troubled man since thought began, and which, since they are apparently insoluble, will still trouble him when

thought ends? (Will it, by the way, or can it ever end?)” In the light, then, of the facts revealed by scientific research, the philosopher proceeds to a renewed consideration of these questions.

Has the universe, for example, any plan or purpose, or is it merely a fortuitous concourse of atoms? Is mind a fundamental feature of the universe, in terms of which we are ultimately to interpret the rest, or is it a mere accident, an eddy in the primæval slime, doomed one day to finish its pointless journey with as little noise and significance as it began it? Are good and evil real and ultimate principles existing independently of men, or are they merely the names we give to the things of which we happen to approve or to disapprove?

Philosophy seeks to study these questions impartially, not desiring to arrive at results which are comfortable or flattering to human conceit, nor to construct a universe which is conformable with human wishes. On the contrary, it endeavours to maintain a modest attitude towards objective fact, and to discover truth without fear or favour.

Those who give time to the study of such

impersonal questions are bound to preserve something of the same impartiality and freedom in the world of action and emotion. Since a consideration of fundamental questions shows us how little is certainly known, the philosopher is ready to grant the possibility of contrary views having as much or as little truth as his own. Thus philosophy generates an attitude of tolerance which refuses to make the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood, identical with that between the things done and the views held by the self and the contrary actions and thoughts of others, and holds that, just as it takes all sorts to make a world, so does it take all opinions to make truth.

Finally, the fact that no agreed answer has yet been discovered to the most fundamental questions cannot but suggest to the honest thinker that all systems hitherto constructed are in some degree false. Those who have no tincture of philosophy are inclined on all questions not susceptible of proof to supply the place of knowledge by converting their conjectures into dogmas. The philosopher, on the other hand, will admit that even his so-called knowledge is conjectural, and

regard fanaticism, bigotry and dogmatism not only as an offence against manners, but as a betrayal of the truth. It is, therefore, for the sake of the questions themselves which philosophy studies, and of the methods with which it pursues them, rather than for any set of answers that it propounds, that philosophy is to be valued.

Through the greatness of the universe which it contemplates the mind itself achieves greatness. It escapes from the circle of petty aims and desires which for most of us constitute the prison of everyday life, and, forgetting the nervous little clod of wants and ailments which is the self, is elevated into communion with that which is greater than the self. On the practical side this greatness of the mind generates qualities of tolerance, justice and understanding, in the growth of which lies the chief hope for the world to-day.

C. E. M. JOAD.

PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUES

I

THAT COURAGE IS ONLY A FORM OF COWARDICE

JOAD

We are, I understand, to conduct a number of dialogues in order to introduce the great broadcasting public to some of the problems of philosophy.

STRACHEY

Yes, but I doubt if they will profit much by the process. You yourself have said that the philosopher is like a blind man looking in a dark room for a black cat that is not there. Besides, philosophy is, after all, only a form of verbal gymnastics: its disputes are disputes about words.

JOAD

But would you not say that it is the object of words to convey meaning?

STRACHEY

Of course.

JOAD

Then do you think that, of all the words that people use, the words of philosophers alone convey no meaning?

STRACHEY

I don't know about that: my point is that philosophers quarrel about words and not about their meanings.

JOAD

But why should they not quarrel about words? What is the good of having words at all if they are not important enough to quarrel over? Why do we choose one word rather than another if there isn't any difference between them? If I called a woman you were in love with a chimpanzee instead of an angel, would that not be a quarrel about words? If you are not going to argue about words, what are you going to argue about? Do you propose to convey your meaning to me by moving your ears?

STRACHEY

Hardly a very suitable method over the wireless. But do you seriously mean to tell me that you

argue with words in order to discover the truth, and that you are broadcasting these Dialogues in order to turn the eyes of the public in the direction of philosophical truth ?

JOAD

Nothing of the sort. My object is to obtain pleasure for myself. I always do everything for that reason.

STRACHEY

Very selfish of you !

JOAD

If I am selfish, so is everybody else. You too have only come here in order to give yourself pleasure. You have never once throughout your whole life done anything with any other object ; no more has anybody else.

STRACHEY

What utter rot ! Is that philosophy ?

JOAD

No, merely fact.

STRACHEY

But what about unselfishness, self-sacrifice, martyrdom for one's opinions, and all that ? Do

people deny themselves what they want, allow themselves to be persecuted, get burnt at the stake, in order to give themselves pleasure ?

JOAD

Certainly. Unselfishness is only the name we give to those actions which happen to give pleasure to others as well as to the people who do them. Naturally we approve of such actions, and so endeavour to encourage their performance by calling them by some high-sounding moral name like "unselfishness."

STRACHEY

What a lot of Pharisees you seem to think we all are ! But I should like to know how you make out that there is no such thing as an unselfish action.

JOAD

Very simply. Let us take as an example two sets of actions, one apparently selfish and the other apparently unselfish ; and, in order that I may render my contention, that both are really selfish, less repugnant, let us take actions done by children whom, after all, nobody expects to be virtuous. Jack and Jill are each given ten shillings at Christ-

mas time. Jack spends his entirely on himself, perhaps on chocolates with which he makes himself sick, and the world says "How selfish!" Jill, being a prudent little girl, spends hers not upon herself but upon presents for her uncles and aunts, and the world says "How unselfish!" Now I maintain that there was no difference in point of morality between the two actions. Each was acting selfishly to get pleasure for himself and for herself, but, being differently constituted, they each found pleasure in different things.

STRACHEY

I understand the case of the boy: he wants chocolates, he buys them, and so obtains, at any rate temporarily, pleasure. But what about the girl?

JOAD

The girl considers what is likely to bring her most pleasure in the long run. She decides that the approval of uncles, the thanks of aunts, the possibility of a return in kind from the gratified recipients of her gifts, and, above all, the complacent glow of self-satisfaction which comes from the knowledge of having done what she has been taught to consider a good action

which will win her the praise of the world, are, taken altogether, likely to produce more pleasure than a direct expenditure on dolls and chocolates. "Dear little girl, how sweet she is," they will say. She acts accordingly, and, since her object is to get pleasure for herself, I maintain that her action was selfish.

STRACHEY

But what if Jill spends her money on presents for her brothers and sisters, or on poor children? She can expect no return in kind from them. She does it out of sheer affection or out of charity.

JOAD

Take the case of the brothers and sisters first. Is it not a pleasant thing to give pleasure to those of whom we are fond?

STRACHEY

Yes, if we are unselfish enough to love anybody besides ourselves.

JOAD

My dear idiot, there's nothing unselfish about that. We love other people because their companionship pleases us; because we *like* to love them or can't help loving them, not, in short,

because we *ought* to love them. Let them bore us, or do us an injury, or cease to be pleasing to us, and see how much we love them then. But *if* we love people, it *is* pleasant to think that we have made them happy, isn't it ?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Then, if Jill loves her brothers and sisters, by giving them presents she will give pleasure to herself. As to the poor children, the delights of philanthropy are well known. Nothing gives more pleasure than to bestow favours upon others who cannot reciprocate ; nothing is more gratifying to our self-esteem.

STRACHEY

Possibly you are right. But suppose that I rescue a child from a burning house at the risk of my life. Is that, too, done for purely selfish reasons ?

JOAD

Certainly. You are carried away by the excitement of the moment. On the one hand you crave the applause of the crowd, the reputation

of a hero, and the appearance of your photograph in the picture-papers ; on the other, you dread the stings of remorse, the disapproval of your conscience, and the shame of being thought a coward. You act accordingly, doing what you think will give you most pleasure.

STRACHEY

But suppose I don't dash into the house to rescue the child ?

JOAD

If you don't, it will be because you think that you will obtain more pleasure on the whole from the safety, comfort, and freedom from danger attendant upon remaining passive than you will from the delights I have just described. It all depends on the strength of your desire for approval and the liveliness of your conscience. According as these factors vary, so will your estimate of what will give you most pleasure. But the conclusion that you will always in fact do what you think will give you most pleasure remains unaltered.

STRACHEY

Do you apply this conclusion to every possible form of conduct ?

JOAD

Certainly. It is obvious that you never voluntarily do anything unless you want to do it. If, for example, you decide to be burnt at the stake for your convictions, it is because you prefer the prospect of eternal bliss hereafter, coupled with five minutes' anguish now, to the shame of renouncing your most cherished convictions combined with the prospect of everlasting pain in hell. Even if you don't believe in heaven and hell—though by the way most martyrs did—you do not wish to humble your pride by giving way to your enemies, or to outrage your conscience by doing what you conceive to be wrong ; no doubt you have more than a fair share of obstinacy and pig-headedness. Having regard to all these factors, you decide to be burnt, thinking that this course will bring you most pleasure, or enable you to escape most pain—which comes to the same thing—in the long run. If you didn't, you would decide the other way.

STRACHEY

You suggest that the martyr gets burnt only through fear of the consequences to himself, consequences arising from his pride, his conscience

and his apprehension of what will happen to him in the next world, if he doesn't ?

JOAD

Exactly ; and, as being burnt at the stake for your convictions is accounted heroic, we may say that heroism is only a form of cowardice.

STRACHEY

A positively absurd conclusion—what a mathematician would call a *reductio ad absurdum*. You are just generalizing from the case of the religious fanatic. How about the soldier who “ goes over the top ” ?

JOAD

The soldier acts bravely because he fears the consequences of being a coward. The coward acts in a cowardly way because he is more afraid of the consequences of doing what the world calls the brave thing. Both the brave man and the coward shrink from doing what causes them most fear, only they happen to fear different things.

STRACHEY

Why, then, do we all applaud bravery and despise cowardice ?

JOAD

Because bravery in others is useful to us and cowardice is disastrous. Take the case of an army. Every man has a natural tendency to shrink from the open mouth of a belching cannon. All men are alike in this respect. You will find fear of the enemy's bullets as certainly in the V.C. as in the youngest drummer-boy. It is fear that makes men run away, and, if the enemy's bullets were the only things to be afraid of, they always would run away. But they are not the only things.

On the other side there are *esprit de corps*, loyalty, the desire to do what is thought to be the decent thing and, above all, discipline. The effect of these things is, in nine cases out of ten, to make a man more afraid of his conscience, the reproaches of his comrades, and the disgrace of desertion, coupled with the probability of a court-martial, than he is of the bullets of the enemy. Sometimes the reproaches of conscience and the desire to avoid shame are enough to deter a man from what is called cowardice. As a rule, however, more tangible deterrents are required. Hence the invention of discipline, of

which the object is to substitute the certainty of being shot if you don't go over the top for the probability of being shot if you do. Men naturally prefer to take their chance and go over the top. But if they went willingly—if, in short, there *was* such a thing as bravery—it would not be necessary to invent discipline to make them. Fear, as I say, is the universal passion of the soldier, and the object of discipline is to make a man more afraid of the results of showing fear than he is of the enemy.

Since, moreover, a soldier's greater fear of the enemy is disastrous to others, but his greater fear of being thought a coward is beneficial to others, everybody combines to pour contempt upon the first kind of fear under the name of cowardice, and to praise the latter under the name of bravery. But, as you now see, bravery and cowardice are both forms of fear ; the hero is as much afraid as the deserter, and each acts in every instance in such a way as to obtain what he thinks will bring the greatest amount of pleasure to himself, and to avoid what he imagines will bring the greatest amount of pain. The only difference is that the coward happens to be more

afraid of the enemy than of his conscience and a court-martial, while the brave man finds his conscience and the court-martial more formidable. Unless steps were taken to make the consequences of running away more formidable than those of going forward, nine men out of ten would run away. So you see that, just as unselfishness was the particular kind of selfishness which happens to be beneficial to others, so bravery is the particular kind of cowardice which happens to be beneficial to others.

STRACHEY

Lord ! what a ridiculous conclusion. You may be very clever and very logical, but you'll never get me to believe that.

JOAD

No. It's much nicer not to, isn't it ?

II

THAT NO ONE BOOK IS BETTER THAN ANY OTHER

STRACHEY

Good evening, my dear Cyril. You seem to be looking a little cynical.

JOAD

Do I? It must be the heat. How you can carry books about in this weather I don't know. What are they, by the way?

STRACHEY

As a matter of fact they are two books which may, I think, rightly be termed the best and the worst books in the world.

JOAD

Indeed, what are they?

STRACHEY

One is an edition of Shakespeare and the other a novel by the late Mr Charles Garvice.

JOAD

Which of them do you think the best and which the worst ?

STRACHEY

Absurd fellow ! Don't try to be funny ! Of course, I think Shakespeare the best.

JOAD

Then you would say that the works of Shakespeare are what is called good literature ?

STRACHEY

Yes ; wouldn't you ?

JOAD

Well, I would like to consider the question. Tell me, would you say that a book is good in itself ? Or, should we not say that it is good only in so far as it produces a certain effect on those who read it ?

STRACHEY

What do you mean ? I am afraid I do not quite follow.

JOAD

What I mean is that if there were nobody in the world to read a good book, the book could

not in any sense of the word be described as either a good or a bad book.

STRACHEY

Do you mean to say that if Robinson Crusoe had buried the only copy of Shakespeare on his island and left it there it would cease to be a good book ?

JOAD

That is what I am suggesting.

STRACHEY

Oh, I see what you mean—that a book is good only when it gives delight or instruction to its readers.

JOAD

Yes, it is good or bad in proportion to the effect it produces.

STRACHEY

Yes, I grant that.

JOAD

I suppose that when a person dislikes a book you could scarcely describe the effect produced on that person as a good effect ?

STRACHEY

No ; I should think not.

JOAD

And if the book produced a feeling of pleasure or delight, you could scarcely call it a bad effect ?

STRACHEY

Probably not.

JOAD

It looks, therefore—does it not?—that by a good book we mean a book which produces pleasant effects and by a bad book one that produces unpleasant effects. Do you agree ?

STRACHEY

Yes, I suppose so.

JOAD

Then by a good book we mean a book that we like, and by a bad book one that we dislike ?

STRACHEY

That seems to follow.

JOAD

Now you would agree—would you not?—that the breasts in which the books of the late Mr Charles Garvice had produced a thrill of pleasure or delight exceeded in number those which have obtained satisfaction from Shakespeare ?

Could you, as a literary critic, deny that the number of Garvice books sold in a year exceeds, or at least has sometimes exceeded, the sale of Shakespeare, and we may, I suppose, presume that people buy him because they like him ?

STRACHEY

You mean, I suppose, that the total amount of pleasure given by Garvice exceeds that given by Shakespeare ?

JOAD

Yes ; and we agreed that the goodness of a book depends upon the extent of the pleasurable effects it produces ?

STRACHEY

We did.

JOAD

It follows, therefore, that the works of Charles Garvice are better than the works of William Shakespeare.

STRACHEY

Very pretty, my dear Cyril, but quite absurd. You seem to regard poets and writers as if they were confectioners. The more cakes they sell, the more pleasure they give. On your showing,

the greatest writer is always the man with the largest sales. Even there you are not quite right, because I should imagine that many more copies of Shakespeare than of Garvice have been sold. Of course, in one given year more Garvice is sold, but in the long run Shakespeare catches him up and passes him, because people go on buying Shakespeare from generation to generation, while the sale of Garvice stops after one generation.

But it is obviously absurd to attempt to measure the comparative greatness of writers by their net sales certificates, and I do not want to pursue this line of argument further. Let us take another point. You will scarcely deny that there is a difference in quality between the pleasure produced in the reader by the works of Shakespeare and the works of Garvice ?

JOAD

I will not deny it.

STRACHEY

Of course not. Now even if you regard poets in the light of confectioners, it is clear that one confectioner may sell a vast quantity of cakes of an

inferior kind, and another may make much better cakes, but sell comparatively few of them.

JOAD

Certainly.

STRACHEY

Then do you admit that Shakespeare gives a better kind of pleasure than Garvice?

JOAD

I do not admit anything of the kind, and have said nothing to suggest that such an admission was either sensible or possible. What I admitted was the *difference* in the quality of the effects produced. What I did not admit was that the effect produced by one was *better* than the effect produced by the other.

Tell me, what do you mean by a better effect? Do you mean an effect producing some emotion other than pleasure which is also a valuable emotion?

STRACHEY

Yes, I suppose I mean a higher, or, as one might say, a nobler emotion.

JOAD

And Shakespeare produces this emotion because he possesses some quality which those who do not like him fail to comprehend ?

STRACHEY

I suppose that is the reason.

JOAD

Would you not say that those who have grown up in a literary atmosphere, have read books of many kinds, and are, as we should say, good judges of literature, are the kind of people who obtain this peculiar pleasure from Shakespeare, which the mob misses ?

STRACHEY

Exactly. All those best qualified to judge are agreed in this matter, and have no doubt whatever of the superiority of Shakespeare.

JOAD

And how are we to define those best qualified to judge ? You are, I think, in a difficulty here. Those who prefer Shakespeare to Garvice would certainly agree that those are best qualified to judge who prefer Shakespeare to Garvice, but

those who prefer Garvice would take a different view. You are, in fact, being both judge and jury in your own cause, when you invoke the expert to prove the superiority of Shakespeare.

If I ask, how do you know that Shakespeare is better than Garvice, you answer, because those who are best qualified to judge unanimously prefer him. If I ask, who are those best qualified to judge, your answer, in the long run and after a certain amount of preliminary beating about the bush, which out of sheer decency I have spared you, your answer, I say, appears to be "those who prefer Shakespeare to Garvice."

You have gone round and round in a circle—a good book is a book that a good judge likes, and a good judge is the person who likes that good book.

STRACHEY

My dear old thing, what utter rot ! Now look here, you pretend to be a judge of literature—now I'll just read you a couple of things from these books and see if you can notice any difference.

Here is Garvice's description of a scene which is a favourite with writers—the first kiss. The

hero has just confessed his love. The heroine says :

“ It was only when I saw you in the bazaar the other day—when you didn’t see me, faithless one !—that I knew that the affection of a child had grown—although we had not seen each other for so long ; isn’t it wonderful !—had grown up in my heart, just as a seed grows into this—this kind of love. Oh, I can’t tell you what I felt.”
(And then she proceeds to tell him.) “ It was as if, as you passed me, you had stretched out a hand and taken the heart from my bosom. Why, if you had come back at that very moment and said to me—what you’ve just said—I should have fallen into your arms, there and then—as I have fallen now.”

There was silence as he caressed her in the sweet old way which will be ever new.

I will not soil this perfect thing with comment, but I will now read you a passage from *King Henry V.* on the same subject, telling how the King wooed the French Princess :

“ The King : It is not a fashion for maids in France to kiss before they are married, would she say ?

Alice (the Princess's attendant) : Oui, vrayment.

The King : O Kate, nice customs courtesy to great kings. Dear Kate, you and I cannot be confined within the weak list of a country's fashion : we are the makers of fashion, Kate ; and the liberty that follows our places stops the mouth of all find-faults ; as I will do yours, for upholding the nice fashion of your country in denying me a kiss : therefore, patiently and yielding (*kissing her*). You have witchcraft in your lips, Kate : there is more eloquence in a sugar touch of them than in the tongues of the French council ; and they should sooner persuade Harry of England than a general petition of monarchs."

Well, what about it ? Can't you see at once how much better Shakespeare is ? The superiority is so manifest that it scarcely requires to be explained in words.

JOAD

Certainly I prefer Shakespeare. But then what does that prove, since I am equally certain that most library subscribers would prefer Garvice ? Now we are agreed that Shakespeare would be valueless if there were nobody to read

him, and that his value must, therefore, be sought in the effect he produces. So, too, in the case of Garvice. It seems to follow that Garvice is the better man for those who prefer him, Shakespeare for those who prefer *him*, and I cannot see why you should say, much as I appreciate the compliment, that my judgment is to be preferred to that of the Garvice lovers.

STRACHEY

Because, my good fool, you are an educated man with good taste.

JOAD

In other words, because I like Shakespeare. That is to say, Shakespeare is better than Garvice because those who have good taste—in other words, those who prefer Shakespeare to Garvice—prefer Shakespeare to Garvice. You have tried to go round that circle before, and I refuse to follow you round it again. Good night !

III

THE MEANING OF PROGRESS THAT MEN ARE NO BETTER THAN MONKEYS

JOAD

Progress, I think, is our subject to-night.

STRACHEY

Yes, after our last talk it would be as well for us to do something uplifting. But I am afraid it will be rather dull.

JOAD

Why ?

STRACHEY

Because everybody in these days believes in progress.

JOAD

Do they? Well, I wonder what they mean by it.

STRACHEY

Why, surely, something like this : that we are better than savages, that savages are better than

monkeys, and monkeys better than primitive amœbas.

JOAD

You mean primordial, I presume.

STRACHEY

Well, things like jellyfish, you know.

JOAD

And the amœbas, the monkeys, and the savages, in what light do you suppose they view the matter ?

STRACHEY

What do you mean ?

JOAD

Well, you say, for example, that we have progressed beyond the monkeys, but I am not sure that the monkeys would concur in that opinion.

STRACHEY

Well, does it matter much what the monkeys think ? Surely you would admit that men *are* better than monkeys.

JOAD

Assuredly they are better, according to the standards by which they choose to judge them-

selves. For example, they have more intelligence, and they are able to use that intelligence to invent excuses for what they naturally want to do, and arguments for what they naturally want to believe ; they use it, for example, to argue in favour of the present belief that they are better than monkeys. But why should men's standards be those which must necessarily be applied ? The monkey would judge by different standards. And in comparing himself with us in such matters as ability to swing from branches by the tail, and to keep himself warm without having to wrap himself up in the skins of other animals, he would consider that the comparison was all in his favour. Even by some human standards the monkey has the advantage. He is nothing like so efficient in killing as are men ; he kills fewer, he kills less quickly, and he does not kill more than he wishes to eat.

STRACHEY

Do you then deny the whole doctrine of evolution ?

JOAD

Not at all. But evolution is merely a process that scientists have observed. It produces differ-

ent species, but it gives us no assurance that one species is better than another.

STRACHEY

But surely it does. After all, evolution only works by the survival of the fittest.

YOAD

What do you mean by "fittest?" Fittest only to survive? The fallacy of your argument rests upon the assumption that what has appeared later in time is, therefore, greater in value. Admittedly we have turned up later than the amœba, but when we say we are, therefore, better, we are in the position of being both judge and jury in our own cause. It is to us that the palm of progress is awarded, and it is we who award the palm. I cannot help thinking that the amœba, if his vote could be obtained, would be found to cast it for himself. Meanwhile, in the absence of any expression of opinion from that source, it is the part of conceit to assert progress and of prudence to suspend judgment.

STRACHEY

Well, but at that rate I don't see how anybody can say whether anything is better than anything else.

JOAD

My dear John, will you allow me a word of explanation——

STRACHEY

Yes, you don't get much of a show in these Dialogues, do you ?

JOAD

——A word of explanation, in order that I may make a very elementary distinction. Progress involves two things—(a) movement, (b) direction. Progress, in short, is movement in a certain direction. You cannot have direction without a goal. If you will permit me a simple instance, let us suppose that I leave this studio, place myself in the Strand and set my legs in motion.

STRACHEY

You would stop the traffic if you did that.

JOAD

Quiet ! Quiet ! So long as my legs move there is motion, but, until I know whether I want to go to Charing Cross or to Fleet Street, until, in other words, I know my goal, it is impossible to tell whether I am progressing or not.

STRACHEY

But couldn't you ask the way ?

JOAD

That would not be much good unless I knew where I wanted to go. It would be like *Alice in Wonderland*. You remember the conversation with the Cheshire Cat. Alice says "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here ?" The Cat replies : "That depends a good deal on where you want to go to." "I don't much care where," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

STRACHEY

Yes, but do you remember how it goes on ? Alice says that she doesn't mind so long as she gets somewhere, and the Cat says : "Oh, you are sure to do that if you only walk long enough" ; so you see that the Cat believed you could make progress, if you were determined enough about it.

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JOAD

But to get somewhere is not progress ; it may be retrogression. For example, the hundred

years or so that witnessed the sack of Rome, the destruction of its Empire, and the submergence of its culture beneath floods of Goths and Huns is not usually called a period of progress.

STRACHEY

But to-day, at least, we do know where we want to go. We all want greater happiness for everybody, more freedom, better material conditions, more knowledge, culture, and enlightenment.

JOAD

Put in those general terms, I agree. But happiness, culture, and knowledge are vague terms by which everybody means something different: the happiness of pigs, for example, would be best promoted by continual fattening instead of by killing, and it is clear, therefore, that it is not their happiness we mean, when we say that we want more happiness. An increased knowledge of poison-gases is certainly knowledge, but it is doubtful whether such knowledge is to be considered progress. And when we come to give meanings to these ultimate terms, there is the widest disagreement. Whether

we are to have more law or less, more government or less ; socialism, anarchism, individualism, or collectivism ; puritanism, stoicism, or epicureanism ; a country life or a town one ; few wants, all of which are satisfied, or exquisite pleasures rarely obtained ; whether we are to get rid of our temptations by yielding to them, or cultivate an iron self-restraint ; whether success in life is to know where to stop and then to go a little bit further, or to stop where you ought ; whether the development of self or the devotion of self to Society is the end for which we ought to strive—these are the questions about which we differ most, and shall continue to differ. Until they are settled, it is meaningless to talk of progress.

STRACHEY

Well, but although we may not have a very clear idea of our ultimate good, yet we do all of us know instinctively what things are leading towards our unknown destination, whatever that may be. After all, the last century alone saw a degree of progress in our command over nature unparalleled in the history of the world. It is idle of you to pretend that scientific knowledge

and its application have not freed, or at any rate could not free men from the necessity of devoting nine-tenths of their energy to the task of maintaining physical life. Why, science will soon emancipate mankind altogether from the gross and the material, and allow him to transfer his energy to the plane of the spiritual and the mental.

JOAD

You consider then that the coming of the age of science and machinery constitutes what is called progress ?

STRACHEY

Certainly I do ; by the aid of machines we have enormously increased our command over nature.

JOAD

Yet the only way we can recover from the noise and the filth and the ugliness which the process of making machines to command nature has engendered, is by retiring into those parts of the country where nature is still in undisputed command over man, a course which all those who have enough sense to use their leisure to obtain health and happiness unanimously follow.

STRACHEY

We have multiplied production, and can turn out a score of vests in the time which it formerly took to produce one.

JOAD

But we have produced a score of backs to wear them for every one that existed previously. England has quadrupled her population in the last hundred years.

STRACHEY

We have invented machines to shorten man's labour, thereby increasing his leisure.

JOAD

Yet more human beings are engaged in attending to machines than are engaged in direct tendance upon other men ; more time is spent in looking after machines than after men ; while the whole tendency of the modern world is towards what is called "speeding up," that is to say, towards more hustle and less leisure. Machines may save time, yet men had never so little time to waste.

STRACHEY

Transit grows more rapid, and men can travel immense distances at great speeds below, upon, and above the surface of the earth.

JOAD

With the result that, instead of taking healthy exercise, they must burrow like moles in the bowels of the earth to get to their work, and the countryside is made hideous by the noise of explosive engines and the stink of tar and petrol.

STRACHEY

Still, we do get quickly from place to place when we want to.

JOAD

But, as Matthew Arnold said years ago, what is the good of a train taking you quickly from Islington to Camberwell, if it only takes you (I am quoting Matthew Arnold's own words) "from a dismal and illiberal life in Islington to a dismal and illiberal life in Camberwell?" His question is more pertinent now than when he asked it.

STRACHEY

Medical science has made marvellous strides. There is no limit to the cures that can now be effected in cases that were previously considered hopeless.

JOAD

With the result that we keep alive many people who were better dead, and whom previous societies had the sense to let die. The consequence is that there are more invalids to-day than ever before. Besides, the skill which medical science has acquired in patching up damaged bodies is more than discounted by the skill which chemical science has acquired in blowing them to bits again. And since the destructive progress is much more rapid than the constructive, and operates with equal effectiveness against many thousands at once, we may shortly expect to exterminate ourselves altogether.

STRACHEY

We can control birth, and go in for eugenics.

JOAD

With the result that we have a rapidly selective birth-rate, discriminating against the better

educated and more intelligent, and expressing itself in a rapidly deteriorating population.

STRACHEY

What a gloomy fellow you are to-night ! If you go on like this, we shall have these Dialogues stopped, on the ground that you are wilfully and deliberately depressing the public.

JOAD

But I am not denying progress. I am simply trying to show that by each of the standards *you* endeavour to apply, the modern world is no better off than its predecessors. Disraeli put my answer to your boast of the progress of science and machinery fifty years ago, when he said that the Victorians believed in progress because by the aid of a few scientific discoveries they had succeeded in establishing a society which mistook comfort for civilization. But this does not mean that there may not be standards more reasonable than any you have suggested, by which progress is real.

STRACHEY

Stuff ! That does not mean anything. My dear Cyril, I have often heard you say that happi-

ness and intelligence are incompatible, and that man has always had to choose between being Socrates unhappy and being a pig happy. After listening to you to-night I should plump for the pig every time.

JOAD

And, according to my conception of progress, you would be wrong.

STRACHEY

Then do you believe in progress ?

JOAD

Certainly I do.

STRACHEY

Then what do you mean by it ?

JOAD

I mean that advance of life which constitutes the process known as evolution, an advance which, expressing itself in all the myriad forms of living organisms, in the amœba and the jelly-fish as surely as in you and me, strives to achieve an ever-growing mastery over matter, that it may impose

order upon chaos, and infuse with conscious intelligence a universe that was in the beginning deadness and chaos. I believe that this force of life has purposes which far transcend in importance the individual happiness of the numberless units in which it finds temporary expression, and that the existence of merely happy people, that is to say, of organisms who, instead of carrying on life's struggle and fulfilling its mission, acquiesce contentedly in what has been won, is a sign that in them the force of life has stagnated or miscarried. Happy pigs are, therefore, for me not symptoms of progress. Nor, I may say, are comfortable citizens. But all this is a long story and another one.

STRACHEY

It is a very intriguing one, and not so depressing as your complaining peevishness this evening. Anything would be better than that. May we have it some time ?

JOAD

Perhaps, when you have progressed sufficiently to understand it.

IV

THAT YOU CAN'T DO WHAT YOU DON'T WANT, AND DON'T WANT WHAT YOU CAN'T DO

STRACHEY

I have lately been reading some of this new psycho-analysis stuff—Dr Freud and the Unconscious and all that, you know. It's rather exciting to discover how wicked one is at the bottom, isn't it?

JOAD

Yes, Freud's doctrine of the Unconscious is deservedly popular. It has given pleasure to great numbers of quiet and well-behaved people who like to console themselves for their innumerable self-denials by believing that they are desperately gay dogs at heart, and that it is only by a tremendous and continuously exercised effort of self-control that they manage to keep their violent and primitive passions in restraint. The belief is also flattering because it enables them to pride

themselves on the strength of what they call their will ; but, of course, it is all nonsense really.

STRACHEY

What is all nonsense ? Psycho-analysis, or the will, or what you have just been saying ?

JOAD

I meant that the belief in the will is all nonsense ; though, if you prefer to talk about psycho-analysis, I shall have pleasure in maintaining that that is all nonsense too.

STRACHEY

I see you are in one of your irritating moods to-night. Nothing is sacred to you, not even Freud. But we are billed in the programme to talk about the will, so please have the goodness to stick to that, and kindly explain your absurd statement that the belief in the will is all nonsense.

JOAD

Well, when I said that the belief in the will was all nonsense, what I meant by the will was that peculiar kind of organ in which the Victorians believed. They thought,

you know, that we ought to restrain most of our natural impulses, and that we possessed a thing called the "will," by the exercise of which the restraint could, if we were sufficiently in earnest, be achieved. The will checked surliness, sensuality, selfishness, anger, and goodness knows what else to such an extent that fifty years ago all self-indulgence was restrained except indulgence in self-restraint.

STRACHEY

Well, you are pleased to mock at our virtuous forefathers, but surely their doctrine is true in essentials. What then do you mean when you call it nonsense? Don't you think that we ought to do our best to restrain the passions, as the Victorians advised?

JOAD

It is not a question of ought or ought not; the truth is that we cannot. The whole position is misleading, because, in exhorting us to use will to restrain desire, it assumes that we have a will and can use it freely. Nothing of the sort is the case.

STRACHEY

Oh, now I suppose you are running off on to the old predestination argument. You are going to say that everything in the future is already settled, since the future is merely the inevitable result and consequence of the past ; that we are only puppets dancing on strings that are pulled by a ruthless destiny. Do you remember Father Ronald Knox's Limerick on the subject :

“ There was a young man who said damn,
I suddenly see that I am
A creature that moves in predestinate
grooves,
In fact not a bus but a tram.”

Are you going to give us all that old stuff over again ?

JOAD

Not at all. I am only going to point to certain obvious facts. In the first place, let us consider a little more closely what the ordinary man's conception of the will, and of the passions which it restrains, involves.

We may on this view liken a man's moral

the horses. When I say self-regarding, I mean that each desire is concerned only to secure its own satisfaction, and is quite indifferent both to the satisfaction of the others and to the good of the whole. It often, in fact it usually, happens that the satisfaction of one desire is incompatible with the satisfaction of another. Thus I may desire at one and the same moment to sit at home and read for an exam. I have determined to pass, and also to go to the cinema. If I gratify one desire I do so at the expense of the other. But, besides these unruly self-regarding desires, I also have a desire which, unlike the others, is not for some particular thing but is for the good of the whole. This desire is the coachman. It is the business of this desire to keep a watch upon the others, allowing them only just so much satisfaction as is consistent with the good of the whole, and so dovetailing them into one another that no one of them is indulged at the expense of the others. This desire for the good of the whole is called the "will," and it is thought that by its means the individual is enabled, if he chooses, to keep his unruly desires in check, so that he may pursue a straight and consistent path through life. Would

you agree that this roughly indicates the sort of thing people mean when they talk about the will ?

STRACHEY

Yes, I think it does, roughly. But what is the objection to this view ?

JOAD

Well, in the first place, this "will" that people talk about seems to be a kind of desire, does it not ?

STRACHEY

According to what you have just said, it is the desire to suppress other desires which are harmful to the good of the whole ; but whether the will is really a desire or whether it is something different from desire I don't know.

JOAD

We will not let that point worry us ; for, let us suppose that the will is something different from desire. Nevertheless, it cannot operate, I presume, unless we desire to exercise it. It won't go off on its own, so to speak.

STRACHEY

I don't quite follow.

JOAD

What I mean is this. Assuming that the will is not itself desire, we may say that it is like a sort of engine, a piece of psychological machinery, by means of which we can check unruly desires. But this engine cannot work unless we desire it to do so. Desire, in short, is like the steam which sets the engine of the will going. Hence it seems to me that we must say that the will operates only when we want it to operate.

STRACHEY

I should say that we can will something only when we want to will it, or will to will it.

JOAD

And will to will to will it, and so on *ad infinitum*. I don't mind, provided it be understood that the beginning of the whole process is some spontaneous act of desire on our own part.

STRACHEY

All right !

JOAD

Now let us return to psycho-analysis.

STRACHEY

By all means.

JOAD

Psycho-analysts tell us that the origin of all our desires is to be located in the Unconscious. The desire which appears in consciousness may seem to be very different from the unconscious desires—usually it is more respectable—but at the bottom of it is the same desire in another, if more reputable, form.

STRACHEY

You mean that my unconscious desire to marry my uncle's charwoman may appear in consciousness as a sudden liking for pickled cabbage?

JOAD

Yes, something of that sort, the transformation having been undertaken by what Freud calls the "censor" in the interests of propriety. Very well, let us assume that the origin of all desires is to be found in the Unconscious. What then? We are not conscious of what is going on in the Unconscious, are we?

STRACHEY

Why not?

JOAD

If we did it would not be unconscious, silly !

STRACHEY

Oh, all right !

JOAD

If we don't know what is going on there, we can't control it. Therefore we cannot control our unconscious desires.

STRACHEY

I agree, but we can control our conscious ones.

JOAD

Wait a bit. The unconscious desire is moulded and transformed by the censor or by some other force, so that it appears in consciousness as a different sort of desire.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

But we are clearly not responsible for this moulding and transformation, since we do not know that it is going on ?

STRACHEY

No.

JOAD

Very well then, we are not responsible for the form in which our desires appear in consciousness.

STRACHEY

It seems not.

JOAD

Nor are we responsible for their strength.

STRACHEY

Why not ?

JOAD

Because according to the psycho-analysts they spring from the unconscious parts of our being, and often force their way into consciousness in spite of our efforts to prevent them. Therefore the force they possess is not consciously or even willingly given to them by us. Take, for instance, the case of the drunkard violently desiring another whisky and wishing he didn't.

STRACHEY

Agreed ; but he can control his desire.

JOAD

Ah, but can he ? He can control his desire only in virtue of the will to control it, and this will,

as we have seen, can come into operation only if there is a desire to exercise it. Therefore you have at the same moment two contrary conflicting desires : (1) the desire for the whisky, (2) the desire to use the will to suppress the desire for the whisky. According to what we have just said, we are not responsible for the occurrence of these respective desires, nor are we responsible for their respective strengths. Now what we do will depend upon our strongest desire at the moment.

STRACHEY

How do you mean ?

JOAD

I mean that if the desire for the whisky is stronger than the desire to use the will to suppress that desire, we shall drink the whisky ; if not, not. Very well, then, what we do is determined by our desires at the moment, and is in accordance with the strongest of those desires. For the occurrence and strength of our desires we are not responsible, since, as we have seen, they spring from the Unconscious. Therefore we are not responsible for what we do. Q.E.D.

ourselves desiring things. Now if the desire for a particular thing is the only event going on in our consciousness at the moment, we endeavour to obtain that thing. But the trouble is that at the same moment there may be, and usually is, present a desire for some other thing which is incompatible with the first desire, or, more simply, a desire to suppress the first desire.

STRACHEY

As, for example, in your case of the man who wants to read for an examination and go to the cinema at the same moment.

JOAD

Well, I should call that a case of the second kind ; that is to say, the desire to pass the examination is not really the right name to give to the anti-cinema desire ; it is, I think, more correctly to be described as, at any rate at that particular moment, simply a desire to fight against the temptation of going to the cinema. An example of the first kind is wanting to go on dancing and wanting to go home to bed at the same moment. But the point is surely this.

What you will do depends upon what you most want to do. Take, for example, the case of a temptation. If you want to yield more than to resist, you yield ; if your desire to resist is the stronger, you overcome the temptation. But, since you are not responsible either for the direction of your desires or for the strength of them, you cannot justly incur reproach for your defeat or take credit for your victory.

STRACHET

Yes, I once had a friend who used to say that he could resist anything except temptation. What he meant was, I suppose, that, when he was really tempted to do something, he ceased even to want not to do it. So you think that whatever you do, it means that one desire has won, and one has been defeated, but that you are not really responsible for the way the battle goes.

JOAD

Yes, and I say that the use of the word "will" for the desire to suppress the desire to yield to a temptation obscures this, because it suggests that it is always possible to overcome a temptation.

And indeed it is possible, provided you sufficiently want to overcome it ; but for the strength of this wanting you are not responsible, and, if it is not greater than that of the so-called bad desire, you can't make it so.

STRACHEY

You suggest, then, that there is no known means of strengthening a desire ?

JOAD

Not of doing it deliberately. It may get stronger, and you may help it to get stronger because you want it to, but then you are not responsible for wanting it to.

STRACHEY

But if you are not responsible for any of your desires, it seems to me that the doctrine of free will is a myth.

JOAD

That was what I suggested at the beginning ; and surely, in the light of what we have just said, it is true. Come, let us sum up. What, after all, determines what you do ?

STRACHEY

The desires you have.

JOAD

What determines your desires ?

STRACHEY

Ah well, there you raise a point that has been in my mind for some time. Surely it is possible to distinguish between two kinds of desires. One kind which might be called short-term or immediate desires—such as, in your example, the desire to go to the cinema, and another kind which one might call long-term or deferred desires, such as the desire to pass the examination. The strength of this second kind of desire will depend on one's mental powers. It will be strong in a person who can imagine clearly and vividly a long chain of cause and effect, who can, as it were, look into the future and balance the pain he will feel at hearing he has failed in the examination against the pleasure he would now obtain in going to the cinema. In the case of a person, however, without this kind of imagination, and without the necessary know-

ledge of the consequences of his actions, the immediate pleasure of the cinema will surely outweigh the hypothetical pain of failing in the exam., which he has not the mental grasp to envisage clearly. Hence the fact that, in the case of intelligent and highly-developed people, the big deferred desires exert greater strength than they do in the case of children, idiots, or savages. So we have come to think of those people who normally act in accordance with deferred desires as strong-willed people and the others as weak-willed people. Is not this all we mean by the idea of the will ?

JOAD

No doubt, no doubt ! But just think a moment : your strong-willed person is, according to you, a person of strong mental power ; he has a vivid imagination, can foresee the consequences of his actions, and balance the pleasures of one course against those of another. Very well ! But is he responsible for the possession of these qualities ? Surely both the direction of his desire and the strength of mind in virtue of which he can check the immediate ones and plump for the long-deferred ones depend upon and spring

from his nature. If he is a long-deferred sort of man, he will act accordingly ; if not, not.

STRACHEY

I don't quite follow what you mean.

JOAD

Why, simply this, that since we are accustomed to say that a bad man will have bad desires and a good man good ones, it seems to be generally agreed that our desires spring from our natures and reflect the sort of people we are.

STRACHEY

You mean they are determined by our characters or our temperaments or something of that sort ?

JOAD

Yes. Now, what at any given stage determines your character or temperament ?

STRACHEY

Again I don't follow.

JOAD

Well, most people would say that people's characters were formed by the sort of lives they had led, by their endurance under suffering, the

use they made of their opportunities, the way they exercised power, and so forth.

STRACHEY

You mean, in short, by their actions in the past, and that these actions, from their childhood up, have formed their characters.

JOAD

Exactly. Now, according to what we have just said, those actions have themselves at every stage sprung from or been determined by the characters which preceded and conditioned them.

STRACHEY

But that sounds rather like a vicious circle. Your actions, you say, spring from your character, and your character is formed or determined by your actions.

JOAD

I should put it rather that the process is not so much circular as one that can be pushed back *ad infinitum*. You do what you do because you are that sort of person, and you are that sort of person because you have done what you have done.

STRACHEY

But it must begin somewhere.

JOAD

All right, then, I withdraw "*ad infinitum*," and will start with the first action that any living being voluntarily does, whatever that action may be. This action will spring from the initial character or potentiality for a character that he possesses at birth, since it is this character or potentiality in reaction to its environment that determines what a baby does. Now for this initial character or potentiality the baby is clearly not responsible. Whether it be bestowed by God or by his parents, as an act of grace or an outcome of heredity, it is something given to him and not made by him. But if he is not responsible for his initial character, no more is he responsible for his environment.

Yet this initial character and this environment determine his early actions ; these in time mould his character, from which spring further actions, and so on indefinitely. Therefore a man is responsible neither for his character nor for his actions. Therefore the will is a figment.
Q.E.D.

V

*THAT NOTHING EXISTS EXCEPT
WHEN YOU'RE THINKING OF IT*

STRACHEY

I have often heard high-brow people like you talking about matter as if there was some doubt as to whether it existed or not. Surely you do not seriously mean that this microphone in front of us doesn't exist?

JOAD

As a matter of fact, there are very strong grounds for believing just that—so strong indeed that the view that there is in the universe no such thing as matter is quite irrefutable.

STRACHEY

Then you yourself hold this view?

JOAD

As a matter of fact I don't. There are many theories about the nature of the universe which it is impossible to refute, but which there is no

reason to think to be true. Thus you cannot disprove the theory that the earth is a parasite upon the wing of a fly perched upon the nose of a giant, and that, so soon as the giant chooses to brush the fly away, or the fly decides to change its position, the earth will be smashed to smithereens and we ourselves hurled into eternity. We cannot, I say, prove that this is not the case, but that is no reason for supposing that it is.

STRACHEY

But about matter, you say that there are very good reasons for doubting its existence.

JOAD

Shall we look into them?

STRACHEY

If you like. Everybody will think that we are talking nonsense, but I suppose that won't matter. Even if you succeed in convincing their reason, that will only prove that we never believe what our reason tells us to be true. Man, in fact, might be defined as a rational animal who spends his time in protesting against the dictates of reason.

JOAD

Well, let us suppose that you press your tongue against your teeth. What is it that you are aware of ?

STRACHEY

My teeth.

JOAD

But is it ? Are you not conscious, as we say, of a feeling ?

STRACHEY

Yes, that's what I mean.

JOAD

Where, then, is this feeling that you feel, in your teeth or your tongue ?

STRACHEY

In my tongue.

JOAD

The thing, therefore, that you are immediately conscious of when you press your tongue against your teeth is a sensation in your tongue. This sensation may have been caused by your teeth, but it is not of your teeth that you are directly aware.

STRACHEY

I *am* aware of my teeth. When I grit them together I can feel them ; when they ache I can feel them too.

JOAD

What you mean is that you feel a pain. But let that pass for a moment. Suppose you press your fingers against that table over there ? Feel it ?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

All right. Now what is it that you feel ?

STRACHEY

The table, of course.

JOAD

Are you sure ? Suppose you try to be a little more accurate. Is not that which you actually experience a series of sensations in your fingers ? There is a sensation of something cold, of something hard, and of something smooth. If you look at the table, you will have a sensation of something brown ; and if you strike it with your knuckles your auditory nerves——

STRACHEY

Tapping like that? (*Strachey taps.*)

JOAD

Yes, like that——will vibrate with the sensation of a sharp rapping noise. Your so-called knowledge of the table turns out, therefore, to be an experience of certain sensations occurring in you.

STRACHEY

I am afraid I don't follow. The sensations I feel are in my fingers, but the table which causes the sensations is not the sensations. It has the qualities which I experience, but it is not the same thing as my experience of them.

JOAD

Let us take another example which will perhaps help you to see the point better. Suppose you stand three feet away from the fire: you will experience a feeling of warmth.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

And you say that the warmth is a quality of the fire, and that it is this quality that you experience.

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STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

But now let us suppose that you approach still nearer the fire, so that instead of being three feet away you are three inches. You will now experience a feeling of pain.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

But would you then say that the pain is in the fire?

STRACHEY

No.

JOAD

But the pain is only a more intense degree of the warmth.

STRACHEY

Is it? Oh, yes, I see what you mean. As my hand gets nearer to the fire and becomes hotter, I get a feeling of pain, which is in my hand and *not* in the fire?

JOAD

But doesn't that suggest that the warmth was not in the fire either, but was merely the effect produced by the fire in you ?

STRACHEY

Perhaps it does. But that does not prove that there was no fire to create the impression of warmth.

JOAD

Not so fast ! We must go slowly if we are to get this straight. Just let me mention, however, in passing, that the reasons which made you say that the warmth of the fire is a feeling in you and not a quality of the fire, would apply equally to the hardness, coldness, and brownness of the table. These, too, would appear to be feelings of yours.

Now let us take the case of colour. Suppose that you are colour-blind and that I have normal vision, and that we both look at the same green vase. You see it blue and I see it green. Now are we to infer that the vase is both blue and green at the same time ?

STRACHEY

Yes, there *is* a quality of blueness about green ; green can be broken up into its primary colours of blue and yellow. A colour-blind person can't see the yellows, that's all.

JOAD

Precisely ; the differences in what we see are due to differences in ourselves, or, in other words, we each see a different colour because our visual nerves are differently constituted..

STRACHEY

Yes, that seems to be the case.

JOAD

But in that case the colour is not a property of the vase, but is a sensation of ours, the colour I see being different from the colour you see, because, as I said, our visual or optic nerves (I don't know the correct physiological expression) are different.

STRACHEY

Yes, but that still does not prove that there is no vase.

JOAD

Be patient just a little longer. Do you know anything about the science of optics?

STRACHEY

Nothing at all !

JOAD

I don't know much about it either, but I understand that according to scientists what happens when, as we say, we see an object is something like this. The alleged object sends out rays of light which impinge upon the retina, that is to say, upon a sort of sheet of nerves. The disturbance of the nerves so produced is conveyed along the optic nerve to the brain, where it causes a further disturbance in the cells of the brain. This further disturbance may be described as a picture or impression of the object which produced the initial disturbance. It is of this picture or impression that we are conscious. The brain, in short, is like a screen in a darkened picture-palace which is lit up by the light of consciousness. So-called external objects, with which we come into contact in sensation, throw pictures or impressions of themselves upon the

screen, and it is these pictures or impressions of which we are directly aware when, as we say, we know the object. What we really know is not the object at all, but a mental happening of our own of the kind which is usually called a sensation, impression, or idea. This may be an idea of the object, but it is not, of course, the object.

STRACHEY

That may be all very well, and in so far as it shows that we never know objects but only the impressions or pictures produced by them in our brains, I dare say it is true. But it does not show that there are no objects. There must be objects to cause the effects.

JOAD

Well, I am not so sure about that. It seems that we can know only our own sensations, and that we never in knowledge come into contact at all with an external world of matter. Whenever we try to establish contact, our own sensations and ideas insist on getting in between. Is it then such a very improbable assumption that that which we do not know and never can know does not exist?

STRACHEY

But it must exist. How else can the sensations be caused ?

JOAD

Well, let us carry our analysis a little further. We have shown that when we tried to touch our teeth what we felt was a something in the tongue, that the hardness of the table was a sensation in our fingers, the heat of the fire a feeling of warmth and then of pain in ourselves, the colour of the vase an impression on our optic nerves. Can we not similarly show that all the qualities of objects resolve themselves into feelings of ours ? But let us first tackle one more quality of these alleged objects. What about their size ?

STRACHEY

Well, the size of an object is clearly something constant. You can measure it with a ruler or a tape-measure. Its weight, too, is something that really belongs to it, independently of any effect it may produce on us.

JOAD

Let us take the leg of a cheese-mite. It is so small that no human eye can discern it ; we have

to use a microscope. But does that mean, do you think, that the cheese-mite is unable to see its own leg ?

STRACHEY

It must be able to do that, I suppose.

JOAD

Yes, otherwise he would be unable to use his leg effectively, to remove it from impending danger or even to clean it. It can hardly be doubted, then, that the leg of a cheese-mite is seen by him, and probably appears to him to be as large as our own legs do to us. Hence the leg of a cheese-mite appears to have one size to the cheese-mite, another to the human eye plus a microscope, and none at all to the human eye unassisted. Which of these then is the real size of the leg ? Has it indeed got a real size at all ?

Similarly with shape. We commonly believe that the shape of a penny, for example, is circular, and that this shape really belongs to the penny. Yet, if we look at the penny from any position we like to choose, excepting only from the two positions which are perpendicularly above and perpendicularly below it, it appears to be elliptical,

the ellipses varying in degrees of fatness or thinness according to the point of observation. Now, when the penny has so many different apparent shapes, on what principle do we select one and one only from out of the number, and say that it is the *real* shape of the penny?

STRACHEY

For all sorts of reasons. If you draw straight lines from the centre of the penny to the circumference they are all equal in length. Besides, a penny has the same shape as that which compasses describe, and everybody knows that a pair of compasses describes a circle.

FOAD

But surely that is only a way of saying that the shape which the penny appears to have to the compasses, or presents to the compasses, is circular. Why should the appearance it presents to the compasses be the appearance which is its real shape? And what, after all, is a circular shape? Admittedly it is the name that we give to the shape possessed by the penny. But what is the shape which the penny possesses?

STRACHEY

Circular, of course.

JOAD

You don't see the point. We want to know the shape of the penny.

STRACHEY

Well, it is circular.

JOAD

And what is a circular shape?

STRACHEY

Well—the shape of a penny.

JOAD

Exactly! It is the argument you see that is circular, not the penny! Now I maintain that, since the penny actually seems to have a different shape, according to the place from which we look at it, we must conclude that the apparent shape is, like the apparent colour, a product of the conditions under which we look at it. The shape and size of a thing, like the colour, temperature, and feel of a thing, all depend upon the observer and vary with the observer, /

STRACHEY

Well, even if that is so, it still does not disprove the existence of the thing.

JOAD

I am just coming to that. The qualities of a thing, we are agreed, resolve themselves into sensations and impressions of ours. They differ for different people, and they differ for the same person as the person changes his position. Nevertheless, you say that there must be a stable something to produce these effects in us. But what is this stable something, if it is not the sum of its qualities?

STRACHEY

It is the object which has the qualities, of course.

JOAD

But is there in addition to the qualities which, as we say, the object has, a something other than the qualities by which the qualities are possessed? Consider a chocolate. A chocolate has qualities of stickiness, brownness, sweetness, softness, and so forth. Take all these away and what is left? What is it that has these qualities but which is itself other than they?

STRACHEY

The material basis of the chocolate, whatever that may be.

JOAD

Whatever fiddlesticks ! Suppose there were such a material basis, how could you know it except in virtue of its qualities ? You postulate a sort of material substratum or foundation for the qualities in which, as it were, they inhere. But such a substratum, if it had no qualities itself, neither weight, density, size, consistency, nor texture, would be just nothing at all. Can't you see that ?

STRACHEY

Yes, I think so : you mean there is no pure substratum but only qualities, because if you were to strip all the qualities away and there *was* something left, that something would still have qualities, which it couldn't have had, if you really had stripped all the qualities away. And I suppose you can't think of something *not* having qualities. Is that it ?

JOAD

Yes, as you so lucidly put it, that is exactly what I mean. And since we have already shown

that qualities may be resolved into ideas and sensations of ours, and since, as it now appears, there is nothing in an object besides its qualities, it would seem to follow that there is nothing which cannot be resolved into our ideas and sensations. In other words, there is no such thing as matter, or if there is, we never know it. The world, in short, consists of our sensations and ideas.

STRACHEY

What rot ! If I were to punch you on the nose you would soon know whether matter existed right enough.

JOAD

That is a remark which shows that you have entirely missed the point of the argument. The only thing of whose existence I should be aware would be an acute pain in my nose, or in other words, a feeling of mine. Really, my dear John, you are no more intelligent than Dr Johnson, and more reckless in your illustrations. Let me read to you out of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* :

“ After we came out of church we stood talking for some time together of Bishop

Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed that, though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone till it rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus !' "

You see you are in good company.

VI

THAT NOTHING EVER CHANGES

JOAD

Hullo, John ! you are not looking quite yourself to-night.

STRACHEY

Well, the prospect of another half hour's dialogue is a little wearing. A talk with you doesn't make one any younger.

JOAD

Then if you don't feel any younger, I suppose that you wish me to infer that you are feeling a little older.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

A delusion, I assure you.

STRACHEY

Well, it may be a delusion that I am feeling older, but you can't deny that I am, in fact, a

fortnight older than I was when we chatted about matter.

JOAD

And yet to-night I do deny it.

STRACHEY

Well, I wish you could convince me of it, for I certainly feel a changing man. You remember that old French proverb, "Tout lasse, tout passe, tout casse"? Everything grows weary, everything passes away, everything breaks down—or to give you a different version of the same thing: "Change and decay in all around I see."

JOAD

Your sentiments, my dear John, do you credit, but, as usual, they are more remarkable for their poetry than for their accuracy.

STRACHEY

What do you mean? To me they seem accurate to the point of platitudinousness, trite beyond belief, while yours, my dear sir, are, as usual, remarkable rather for their obscurity than for their common sense.

JOAD

Why ?

STRACHEY

You seem to deny that I have either got older or changed in any way since our last dialogue.

JOAD

You need not flatter yourself that you are peculiar, for nothing has grown older or changed since our last dialogue.

STRACHEY

Be so good as to explain.

JOAD

I am merely asserting the obvious fact that nothing ever changes.

STRACHEY

Some explanation still seems necessary.

JOAD

Very well, you shall have it. We will take anything you like to choose and consider whether it does, in fact, change.

STRACHEY

Well, let's take anything or rather everything, for everything seems to me to be constantly changing.

JOAD

Very well, then, let us first of all take everything, that is to say, the sum total of everything that is.

STRACHEY

The whole universe, the cosmos, you mean ?

JOAD

Right ! Now everything that there is cannot become more than itself, can it ?

STRACHEY

Why not ?

JOAD

Because the universe or all that there is could only become more than itself by the addition of something else, and there is nothing more to add, since if there were something more to add, it could only be because you hadn't started with everything. Nor, on the other hand, can it become less than itself, for it could only do this if some part of it were removed and went somewhere

else ; and, if there were somewhere else whither this part might go, it could only mean again that you hadn't started with the whole universe, since there is nowhere outside the universe. Therefore the sum total of everything there is cannot become either more or less ; therefore it cannot change.

STRACHEY

Stop a minute. Although it cannot change in quantity, surely it may change in quality ? For instance, we may conceive of the universe being at the moment good or bad, or hot or cold, or long or short, or fat or thin, or pink in colour—well, it might suddenly begin to turn black. Surely such a change is conceivable even in the case of all that there is ?

JOAD

But the pinkness of the universe, if we suppose it to be pink, would be due to the presence of certain chemical constituents. If the universe were to become black, these constituents would have to change ; the existing constituents would, in other words, have to go somewhere else and be replaced by different constituents. But, as I have pointed out, there is nowhere else for the existing

constituents to go to ; therefore, if they were to change, they could do so only by going out of existence altogether. Now, matter cannot go out of existence. Therefore, you see, the universe can no more change in quality than it can in quantity, for the simple reason that a change in quality would be, in the long run, a change in quantity.

STRACHEY

But surely new constituents might arise spontaneously ?

JOAD

In other words, you mean that they might come out of nothing ?

STRACHEY

I suppose so.

JOAD

But nothing can come out of nothing, because, if it did, it would be not nothing that you started with, but the potentiality for the something that subsequently came out of it.

STRACHEY

Well, I think it was a pity that we took anything so abstract as the universe as our example. It gave

you too much room in which to wriggle. Let us come out of the clouds and take something homely and concrete. How can you pretend, for example, that a green leaf does not change to yellow in the autumn ?

JOAD

You happen to have hit on an instance rather popular with the Greeks.

STRACHEY

Perhaps the suggestion came out of the remnants of my classical education.

JOAD

Maybe, maybe ; but it is a bad one for all that. A green leaf, you say, changes to yellow. Will you first tell me what it is that changes ?

STRACHEY

The leaf, of course.

JOAD

But it is the same leaf, is it not ?

STRACHEY

It is the same leaf, I agree ; but its colour has changed.

JOAD

But that surely is impossible, for its colour is yellowness, and, though people talk of a thing changing colour, nobody ever supposed that one colour could become another colour—that greenness, in short, could become yellowness.

STRACHEY

Why not ?

JOAD

Because, if it did, it would not be greenness. All you can say is that there was once greenness and that there is now yellowness. One colour, in short, has replaced another colour, but that does not mean that the first colour has become the other colour ; and if the leaf has not changed and the colour has not changed either, I still ask what it is that has changed.

STRACHEY

But surely you will admit that there has been change of some sort ?

JOAD

Certainly. I am not denying the existence of change at this point. What I am questioning is this notion that a *thing* changes. Let us take

another example. Supposing you are first angry and then become calm, you would say, would you not, that your angry state of mind had changed into a calm one?

STRACHEY

Yes, that seems to me a good instance of something which does change.

JOAD

But consider the angry state itself. It is not in itself a stable permanent state, is it?

STRACHEY

How do you mean?

JOAD

Well, take any moment of it: is it at that moment the same as it is at any other moment?

STRACHEY

Why should it not be?

JOAD

In the first place, we are accustomed to think of any state, such as anger, as growing or diminishing in intensity; it swells to a climax and then begins to abate. At no moment is there precisely the

same amount of emotion being experienced as there is at any other moment. But, apart from that, any single moment of our experience must, whatever the nature of that experience, be different from any other moment that precedes it, simply because it comes after that other moment. Take, for example, what appears to be the most stable of our mental states, the visual perception of an external object. I may continue to look at the object from the same side, from the same angle, and in the same light. Nevertheless, the vision I now have of it differs from the vision I have just had of it, because it carries with it the memory of that preceding vision. Something of the past overflows, as it were, into the present, and makes that present different simply because of the past fact and the memory of the past fact that has preceded it. Therefore, no one look at a thing is the same as another look at the same thing, and any moment during that one look is different from any other moment during the same look.

STRACHE?

That may be true, but surely all you are saying is that one's states of mind shade off into each

other by imperceptible degrees. Everybody, of course, knows that, but it does not mean that anger is the same as the calm that succeeds it.

JOAD

I agree that it does not mean that, and I never said that anger was the same as calmness. There is certainly change between a state of anger and a state of calm ; but equally there is change during the state of anger itself and during every moment of that state. This change, which is going on all the time, is apt to get overlooked, owing to our habit of thinking of our personality as a sort of string with our emotional states like a number of beads, one marked anger, another calmness, another love, and so forth, strung along its length.

All that this means, however, is that we fix our attention upon our changing self in a number of successive mental acts, only noticing the changes that have been going on all the time when they have grown sufficiently marked to attract our attention, and to cause us to say : "Hullo, my anger has evaporated and I am now calm." The true state of the case, which is that

we are changing all the time as much inside one state as between any two states, is thus overlooked.

STRACHEY

But you now seem to be taking an exactly opposite point of view to the one you adopted at the beginning of this talk. Then you tried to pretend that nothing ever changes ; now you seem to be talking about nothing but change.

JOAD

The arguments seem different, I agree, but they both point to the same conclusion, namely, that there is no *thing* that changes. Either there is *no change at all*, or, if there is, there is *nothing but change*.

STRACHEY

But surely your statement that nothing ever changes because everything is change is a verbal point, and all your arguments have been mere quibbles. Do you still deny that things do change ?

JOAD

Yes, and my argument is not merely a quibble. I want you to point to any one single thing that changes. A thing, that is to say, to which changes

occur, but which is something other and over and above the changes which occur to it. Where is there any one thing which, though subject to change, is itself permanently there, so to speak, for the changes to occur in and to it.

STRACHEY

You mean, in short, that everything changes all the time.

JOAD

I don't mean quite that, not at least if I am being strictly accurate, because the statement "everything changes all the time," is simply a confused way of saying that the world is simply a series of changes and not a collection of things that change. In other words, there is nothing but change ; but that means that there is *nothing* to change.

It is in any case easy to see that there is something amiss with the idea of a thing that changes because a thing that changes, *i.e.*, a changing thing, could change only by becoming something other than a changing thing, that is to say, by becoming an unchanging thing. In which case it would not be a thing which changes. Hence it follows that the only thing which can truly change is not

a changing thing but an unchanging thing. The paradox that only an unchanging thing can change serves to show to what nonsense the idea of a changing thing reduces itself.

STRACHEY

You have refuted the idea that a thing changes only by asserting that everything is change ; so once again we seem to have been led to the conclusion that the common-sense notion of things brings us into trouble so soon as we begin to think about it closely.

JOAD

Well, it does not need much sense, and never did, to see that common sense is wrong.

VII

THAT TRUTH IS BEAUTY AND BEAUTY TRUTH

JOAD

Good evening, John. I see that, as usual, you have a book with you. What is it ?

STRACHEY

I have been reading Keats, the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

JOAD

Lovely poetry, of course, but great nonsense.

STRACHEY

Keats great nonsense ? My dear Cyril, what do you mean ?

JOAD

Simply that Keats made a number of completely erroneous statements.

STRACHEY

Oh, did he ? Well, may I ask if you presume to question the truth of the famous lines which end this poem :

“ Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to
know.”

JOAD

Certainly I question the truth of those lines. Indeed, they appear to me to be completely false. Beauty is not truth nor truth beauty. Do you yourself agree with Keats that they are identical ?

STRACHEY

Why, certainly I do.

JOAD

In saying this you are, I presume, in your own view at least, saying what is true. You do not wish me to suppose that you are deliberately and disinterestedly asserting what you know to be false ?

STRACHEY

Of course not ! It is only philosophers that do that.

JOAD

Sorry, but I refuse to be drawn. You say, then, that it is true that beauty is truth ; in other words, you have stated a truth.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Now if what you say is true, beauty and truth are identical.

STRACHEY

That is what I am saying—and that is what Keats expressed so marvellously.

JOAD

Whenever, then, the word "truth" occurs we may substitute the word "beauty" for it without altering the sense of the statement.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Well then, it seems to follow, since it is a truth that truth is beauty, that it is beauty that truth is beauty, or a beautiful thing that truth is beauty ;

I know it sounds awful nonsense put like that, yet that is exactly what you are asserting. Isn't it ?

STRACHEY

It seems so !

JOAD

But, seriously, isn't it rather absurd to assert that, when you casually drop the remark that truth is beauty, you have, according to your account of the matter, really created, or brought into being, or made, something that is beautiful—that, in other words, you have increased the store of beauty in the world ?

STRACHEY

Well, if my remark is really true and accurate, I shall certainly not have added to the store of falseness and ugliness in the world, and may even have added in an infinitesimal degree to its store of truth and beauty.

JOAD

Very well then. Look at it in this way. Let us suppose that there is a train which leaves King's Cross for Edinburgh at 6.15. Let us suppose also that I know that it does so. Now you would

not say, would you, that my knowledge of this fact about the train was the train ?

STRACHEY

How do you mean ?

JOAD

What I mean is that the train might very well leave at that time without my knowing it.

STRACHEY

Obviously.

JOAD

Then, since the train can leave at this time even if I do not know it, my knowing it cannot be the same as the train, since one can exist without the other.

STRACHEY

Quite obvious. I don't see why you labour the point.

JOAD

Be patient. Now, would you call the train true ?

STRACHEY

No. The train is real, not true.

JOAD

And the departure of the train at that hour, is that true? Mind, I am not speaking of my or anyone else's knowledge of the departure of the train, but simply of the concrete fact constituted by the train leaving the platform at 6.15.

STRACHEY

No! That is not exactly true: it is rather a fact, a real fact.

JOAD

Now let us suppose that I know the fact, and that it *is* a fact, how would you describe my knowledge of it and my statement of what I know?

STRACHEY

If the train really did leave at that time, I should say it was true knowledge and a true statement.

JOAD

But the true knowledge we have already seen to be other than the fact?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Then the knowledge is true, but the fact is not true.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

May we then say that truth is not something that applies to things or facts, but only to knowledge of them, and that there is true knowledge when there is a real fact to correspond with that knowledge? In other words, truth begins to enter the scheme of things only when you have minds to know.

STRACHEY

I agree.

JOAD

Now let us begin again. Suppose we take the case of a picture that is generally accepted as a masterpiece. This picture, I think, you will agree is real and is a thing.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

May we also describe it, assuming that the world is right in accepting it as a masterpiece, as a beautiful thing ?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

But the judgment with which you and I and the art-critics pronounce the picture to be beautiful is not the same as the picture, any more than my knowledge of the fact that the train left at 6.15 was the same as the train.

STRACHEY

I suppose not.

JOAD

The judgment, in short, is something ; in point of fact, it is a thought inside the head of the person who makes it ; and, if it were the same thing as the picture, we should be saying that our own thoughts were beautiful whenever we said that the picture was beautiful, and condemning ourselves as ugly when we criticized the picture.

STRACHEY

Yes, in a way, I suppose.

JOAD

The judgment, then, is not the picture. Now, with regard to the judgment, is it not a mental thing?

STRACHEY

Certainly.

JOAD

And it asserts something, namely that the picture is beautiful?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

And if there is a real thing which has in fact the qualities which the judgment attributes to it, then the judgment is true.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Now then, let us take a judgment or statement about a picture which is beautiful, and let us suppose it to be a judgment which asserts "This picture is beautiful." In this case we have, have we not, a real fact, namely the beautiful picture

corresponding to the judgment that is made about it?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Then, according to our previous definition, the judgment is true?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

But the picture is different from the judgment?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Therefore the picture cannot be true.

STRACHEY

No, it cannot.

JOAD

And equally, and for the same reason, if the picture about which the judgment is made is beautiful, the judgment cannot be beautiful.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Beauty and truth would seem, therefore, not to be the same.

STRACHEY

You have, as usual, constructed a little logical puzzle, complete but unconvincing.

JOAD

Beauty, in fact, attaches to things, and truth to thoughts, judgments, or statements about them.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

When, therefore, we say of a beautiful thing that it is beautiful, it is not our thought or statement that is beautiful, but the thing.

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

And, since thoughts about things are never the same as the things thought about, it seems to follow not only that beauty is not in the cases we have been considering the same as truth, but that it never can be the same as truth.

STRACHEY

But what about beautiful thoughts? A thought may surely be beautiful, and, since it may also be true, may not truth and beauty in that case be found in the same thought?

JOAD

Let us suppose, what I do not admit, that they could. That would not show that beauty is truth.

STRACHEY

Why not?

JOAD

Consider the case of a table which is both hard and circular. We do not assert that, because the table possesses both these qualities, hardness is, therefore, circularity.

JOAD

Well, no.

STRACHEY

If, therefore, we were to have a thought which was both beautiful and true, we should no more be justified in assuming truth and beauty to be identical than we should have been had we said that hardness was circularity.

STRACHEY

Clearly.

JOAD

But we can go further than that. We agreed, did we not, that thoughts were always different from the things thought about?

STRACHEY

We did.

JOAD

In so far then as a thing has a quality, a thought about it cannot have that quality.

STRACHEY

I agree.

JOAD

If, therefore, a thing is beautiful, a thought about it cannot be beautiful.

STRACHEY

No, it cannot.

JOAD

And since it seems to be absurd to suppose that we can have beautiful thoughts only about things that are not beautiful, I conclude that

thoughts are, not ever beautiful. A beautiful thought is, in short, only a loose and incorrect way of describing a thought which truly asserts the beauty of a beautiful thing.

STRACHEY

Well, that may be logically unassailable. But you cannot convince me that there is not at any rate a connection between truth and beauty, and between ugliness and falseness. One can test it by substituting the words. Try saying :

“Ugliness is truth, truth ugliness” ; or
 “Beauty is falseness, falseness beauty”——

the words simply will not go together—they are impossible bedfellows. Surely this shows that there is some sort of a connection—though what, it may not be possible to say—between truth and beauty? May it not be possible that you haven’t discovered that connection? And, if it is, you have not by any means proved that such a connection does not exist. As Keats says in the same poem :

“Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 As doth eternity.”

The fact that "the silent form" of beauty cannot tease you back into thought does not show that it is unrelated to our other conceptions, such as truth and error.

JOAD

I think that you will find that the connection is one of association merely.

STRACHEY

Perhaps, but then what for us can bind two conceptions together except the fact that there is in one's mind an association between them?

JOAD

I never said that you could not bind or associate two conceptions together. What I did and do say is that the mere fact that you can associate two things together, *e.g.*, men with the smoking of pipes, does not prove that a man is the same thing as a pipe, or that they are necessarily related in reality. I associate things together with my mind just because they are not necessarily associated in fact. If they were, it would not be necessary for me to associate them.

And so it is with truth and beauty.

VIII

LOGICAL PUZZLES

STRACHEY

Well, Cyril, we have come to the last of this series of Dialogues. You have made a great many absurd and fantastic statements in the course of our preceding talks, and although you may have succeeded in producing some ingenious quibbles to support them, yet I doubt whether you have in any single instance convinced *any* single member of the great British public.

JOAD

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

STRACHEY

That is a somewhat oracular statement.

JOAD

I meant to suggest that if you are right in paying so poor a compliment to the intelligence

of the public as to attribute to them your own imperviousness to reason, then few indeed will have been convinced. If this is the case, I cannot help it. My object has been throughout to let reason be my guide and to follow whither she would lead me. Whether my conclusions may or may not appear surprising, strange, or unpalatable is to me a matter of complete indifference, so long as the arguments for them seem to be better than the arguments against them. If we are not to follow reason in these matters, what are we to trust ?

STRACHEY

Well, one is often told to trust to insight or to instinct.

JOAD

The insight of a seer or the instinct of a savage ! Possibly ! But you, my dear John, are not a seer, and I hope you are not a savage, and for plain common-sense people like myself—and I hope I may number you among them—reason seems the best guide.

STRACHEY

It may be so, but these Dialogues have hardly led me to that conclusion, for your reason, which

I agree you have followed unflinchingly, has brought you into some queer passes. Some might go further and call your arguments absurd.

JOAD

The word makes me impatient. You designate as absurd whatever lies outside the walls of the prison that your common sense builds for you. You tempt me to outdo myself and to use my reason to invent paradoxes for the mere pleasure of exposing your inability to refute them.

STRACHEY

I accept your challenge.

JOAD

Very well then. I will let off a number of intellectual squibs ; but for goodness sake don't take them too seriously.

STRACHEY

All right, my dear Cyril ; I assure you that we never take you too seriously ; the danger is, in fact, the opposite.

JOAD

Well, don't say I didn't warn you. A little logic is a dangerous thing——

STRACHEY

Dangerous, you mean, for the logician ?

JOAD

——and a life conducted on the basis of the conclusions I am about to reach would be both complicated and discouraging. Your future, for example, is determined ; so why, in any case, bother ?

STRACHEY

How do you mean ?

JOAD

Well, it is already settled whether or not you are going to be hanged next week.

STRACHEY

How settled ? If I commit a murder to-night, I may be hanged next week ; if not, not. How can you say that it is already settled ?

JOAD

Put it this way. The proposition "John Strachey will be hanged next week" is either true or false, is it not?

STRACHEY

Clearly.

JOAD

And when I say that it is either true or false, I mean that it is either true or false *now*. Neither you nor I may know whether it is a true proposition or a false proposition, but, whichever kind of proposition it is, it is that kind of proposition already. Therefore, although we do not know whether this future event will or will not happen, whether it will happen or not is already settled. But you need not worry since next week will never come.

STRACHEY

Now come, Cyril, that is too much. In a moment you are going to tell me that the end of the world is at hand.

JOAD

On the contrary, I am asserting that next week will never come, because this week will never

stop, and this week will never stop because no period of time can ever elapse.

STRACHET

Well now, begin the explanation.

JOAD

Take any period of time—for example, an hour. Of that hour, half must elapse before the whole can elapse. Do you agree?

STRACHET

I suppose so.

JOAD

And of that unelapsed half-hour, the first quarter must elapse before the whole half-hour can elapse; and of that unelapsed quarter-of-an-hour, the first $7\frac{1}{2}$ minutes must elapse before the whole quarter-of-an-hour can elapse. Now do you see what I am after? The period of time which remains gets continually smaller, but however small it gets, half of it must always elapse before the whole of it does. In other words, something must always happen before any period of time, however small, can elapse. Therefore,

no period of time can ever elapse ; therefore this week will never end.

STRACHET

Well, all that shows is that our attempt to divide the continuous flow of time into arbitrary divisions, such as seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, is in the last resort unsuccessful, for the reason that time is a continuously flowing and unbroken river. But the same argument applies to space, doesn't it ?

JOAD

Yes, but the fact that the argument applies elsewhere does not discredit it. Applying it to space, I will prove to you that you will never move out of that door. For let us suppose that you are, as we say, in motion towards the door, and let us consider your position at any point or moment in your transit. Now at that moment either you are where you are or you are where you are not. If you are where you are, you are not moving, since if you were moving you would not be there ; and you cannot be where you are not ; therefore at that particular moment you are not moving. Similarly, at any other moment you are

not moving ; therefore you never move at all ; therefore you will never get out of this room.

STRACHEY

Didn't some of those Greek fellows whom you are always quoting invent a fable which told how Achilles set out to pursue an escaping tortoise, but maintained that, however fast he ran, he could never catch him up ?

JOAD

Yes, they did, and the argument is this. Suppose Achilles and the tortoise run a race and let Achilles, as is only proper, give the tortoise a handicap. Then Achilles can never catch the tortoise, for he must first traverse the distance between the place at which he starts and the place at which the tortoise starts. While he is doing this the tortoise will have moved forward. Achilles must now traverse the distance between the tortoise's starting-point and the place to which the tortoise has now moved forward, during which time the tortoise will have moved forward again. Thus, whenever Achilles reaches the place where the tortoise is, the tortoise will be somewhere else ; so that, although the distance between them con-

tinually diminishes, Achilles can never actually catch up the tortoise.

STRACHEY

Well, again it is difficult to pick a logical hole in your argument ; but once again the result is in defiance of any kind of reason or probability.

JOAD

As regards reason, it is reason itself that has led us to this conclusion : therefore the conclusion is reasonable. As regards probability, probability itself possesses some highly improbable features. In fact, the only probable thing we can say about probability is that it is probable that we know nothing whatever about it ; for example, it is usually thought that the longer a man remains at the front in a war; the greater is the probability that he will be killed ; but this is clearly not the case.

STRACHEY

Why not ?

JOAD

Well, suppose that on any given day a man's chances of being killed are 5 to 2 against. During

10 such days his chances of being killed are, therefore, 50 to 20 against. Therefore, the longer he remains at the front, the more do his chances of not being killed exceed his chances of being killed ; from which it follows that the longer he stays at the front, the less chance has he of being killed.

STRACHEY

But that at any rate is a fallacy, for though 50 exceeds 20 by more than 5 exceeds 2, yet the proportion between 50 and 20 and between 5 and 2 is exactly the same. And of course in this case it is the proportion that matters.

FOAD

But if, as you assert, the proportion remains the same, then the ratio between his chances of being killed and his chances of not being killed during ten days is the same as the ratio between those chances during one day. Therefore he is just as likely to be killed, neither more so nor less, in one day as he is during ten days, and, since the ratio still remains the same, in one minute as he is during five years. And I contend that that conclusion to which you

yourself have pointed the way is not one which most people would regard as probable.

STRACHEY

But do you then really believe that it is no more dangerous to stay at the front for two days than for one ?

JOAD

Let me put it in another way. Suppose that there are five slips of paper in a hat, and that one of them is crossed ; if you draw an uncrossed slip you pay 5s., if you draw the crossed one you get £1. It is easy to see that you are no more likely to make money by drawing for two days than you are by drawing for one day, since, although your chances of drawing the crossed slip are doubled, so also are your chances of drawing the uncrossed ones. Now let the crossed slip stand for being killed, and the analogy, I think, is complete.

STRACHEY

But your paradoxes seem to be leading you into the position that causes do not have their known effects. Surely you are going to get into difficulties there ?

JOAD

I see no difficulty, since the whole conception of cause and effect appears to me to be meaningless. I entirely fail to understand what is meant by saying that some things are causes and other things are their effects.

STRACHEY

I wonder if I understand you aright? Do you mean to say that if I were to take a match and set a light to those curtains, the lighted match would not be the cause of the burning of the curtains?

JOAD

I agree that you would so regard it, but others would not. Suppose a man to be stationed on a comet moving away from the earth with a velocity equal to that of light, and observing the earth through a telescope. It is clear that he would see events upon the earth only as and when the light bringing the message or report of those events from the earth reached him. Let us suppose that looking at the earth he sees you strike the match. Will he see any event subsequent to that?

STRACHEY

No, not if he is really travelling as fast as light, for the light which is bringing the message of the next event will never catch him up.

JOAD

It follows, therefore, that the position of events upon the earth will appear to him static and changeless. The earth will look like a frozen planet. Do you agree?

STRACHEY

Yes.

JOAD

Now then, let us slightly accelerate the velocity of the observer. He will now be doing what Einstein says he cannot do—that is to say, travelling faster than light. He will, therefore, catch up the light which brings the message of the match-striking event after he has already seen the curtain-burning one. Events upon the earth will, therefore, appear to him to occur in what we should call their reverse order. What we call causes will be regarded by him as effects and *vice versa*, so that the life of a

man will appear to him to begin as a disturbance among worms, an event in the grave and not in the cradle. Therefore what seems to be a cause and what seems to be an effect depends entirely upon the point in time and in space from which you observe them.

STRACHEY

Well, you have asked me and the broadcasting public to believe a great many impossible things.

JOAD

I do not ask you to believe them. Reason does not necessarily tell us that whatever our reason tells us is true. It may be that many things are false which we cannot see our way to refute.

STRACHEY

Well, anyhow you are in good company when you ask us to believe impossible things. Do you remember the passage in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* where the White Queen asks Alice to tell her her age? May I read you the passage?

JOAD

All right.

STRACHEY

Alice replies : " Seven and a half exactly."

" You needn't say 'exactly,'" the Queen remarked. " I can believe it without that. Now I'll give *you* something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months, and a day ! "

" I can't believe that," said Alice.

" Can't you ? " the Queen said in a pitying tone. " Try again, draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

Alice laughed : " There's no use trying," she said. " One can't believe impossible things."

" I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. " When I was your age I always did it half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I have believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."